

## Merkley, Wyden push to expand Smith River National Recreation Area to include Oregon

May 12, 2021



Oregon's U.S. Senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden announced Tuesday they will be introducing legislation to expand the Smith River National Recreation Area by 58,000 acres, which would protect the diverse ecosystems of the rivers, streams and adjacent lands of the North Fork Smith River watershed and help boost the local fishing and recreation industries that many Oregon families rely on.

In 1990, Congress enacted legislation to establish the Smith River National Recreation Area to protect the watershed, but the boundary of the NRA stopped at the Oregon border, leaving the North Fork of the Smith River and its tributaries unprotected.

"When we come together to protect our state's natural wonders, we can create jobs, protect resources, and make sure Oregonians can enjoy the beauty of our state for generations to come," Merkley said. "Expanding the Smith River National Recreation Area is a commonsense win-win-win for our economy, adventurers across the Northwest, and those dedicated to preserving the ecosystems that make Oregon so special. I'm

grateful to all of the local leaders, conservationists, and businesses who have been a part of this process so far and look forward to continuing to work together to get this bill signed into law.”

“This legislation will create jobs and preserve one of the largest undammed rivers in the nation so that generations to come can experience Smith River’s scenic beauty,” Wyden said. “Expanding the Smith River Recreation Area into Oregon protects our state’s world-renowned natural treasures while also investing in our local economies.”

The Smith River is home to a rich assemblage of life forms — Coho and Chinook salmon, Coastal Cutthroat trout, the diverse Siskiyou Mountains forests, unique plants found nowhere else on earth and spectacular redwoods that tower over the lower river banks. The Smith River NRA’s scenic beauty, world-class fisheries and exceptional water quality attract adventurers who partake in water sports, fishing, hunting, camping and sightseeing.

The NRA expansion would permanently withdraw the land from new mining claims, helping to protect this sensitive area from proposed nickel strip mines, and protect 74 miles of scenic rivers, including Baldface Creek, Chrome Creek and nearby streams. In addition, the legislation would task the U.S. Forest Service with updating the recreation plan to reflect the new additions to the National Recreation Area, and produce a special study of streams, fens, wetlands and potentially unstable and vulnerable aquatic habitat areas.

“The Smith River is one of the largest, single, undammed river systems in the United States and we applaud Senator Merkley’s leadership to protect Oregon’s portion. Expanding the Smith River National Recreation Area into Oregon to protect the North Fork and its tributaries will continue to support the region’s growing and sustainable outdoor recreation economy. We endorse the bill and look forward to its swift passage,” said Brady Robinson, executive director of The Conservation Alliance.

“I thank Senator Merkley and support his efforts and legislation to expand the Smith River National Recreation Area in Oregon’s North Fork of the Smith River watershed,” said David Brock Smith, Oregon House Representative HD 01 (R-Port Orford). “The Smith River is an important watershed in Southern Oregon and Northern California, providing critical salmonid habitat, drinking water and recreational opportunities, and I will continue to be a strong state partner in supporting the Smith River, its tributaries and the watersheds of Southwest Oregon.”

“I am happy to offer strong support for Senator Merkley’s work to expand our beautiful Smith River Watershed as part of our fabulous Wild Rivers Coast,” said Court Boice, Curry County commissioner. “The Kalmiopsis Wilderness and Rogue River – Siskiyou National Forest are recognized as the most diverse, wild, unique, rugged and beautiful Landscapes in North America. This legislation will certainly help and is important for maintaining our pristine rivers and recovering the vibrancy of our salmon and steelhead runs.”